

DETAILED CHEMICAL KINETIC MECHANISMS FOR COMBUSTION OF OXYGENATED FUELS

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Thermodynamic properties and detailed chemical kinetic models have been developed for the combustion of two oxygenates: methyl butanoate, a model compound for biodiesel fuels, and methyl formate, a related simpler molecule. Bond additivity methods and rules for estimating kinetic parameters were adopted from hydrocarbon combustion and extended. The resulting mechanisms have been tested against the limited combustion data available in the literature, which was obtained at low temperature, subatmospheric conditions in closed vessels, using pressure measurements as the main diagnostic. Some qualitative agreement was obtained, but the experimental data consistently indicated lower overall reactivities than the model, differing by factors of 10 to 50. This discrepancy, which occurs for species with well-established kinetic mechanisms as well as for methyl esters, is tentatively ascribed to the presence of wall reactions in the experiments. The model predicts a region of weak or negative dependence of overall reaction rate on temperature for each methyl ester. Examination of the reaction fluxes provides an explanation of this behavior, involving a temperature-dependent competition between chain-propagating unimolecular decomposition processes and chain-branching processes, similar to that accepted for hydrocarbons. There is an urgent need to obtain more complete experimental data under well-characterized conditions for thorough testing of the model.

Introduction

Fuels derived from vegetable oils and animal fats offer an alternative to petroleum products for diesel engine combustion. These biodiesel fuels are attractive because of their low sulfur content, which allows the use of a catalyst to remove NO_x from lean-burn engine exhaust to meet new stringent, governmental emission standards. Biodiesel fuels are also renewable fuels which have low impact on global warming and can help limit dependence on foreign-derived fuel supplies. With oxygen content typically 10% or greater by mass [1], biodiesel fuels may also provide soot-reduction benefits similar to those observed for other oxygenated diesel fuels and additives [2]. Although oxygenated fuels do not directly reduce NO_x emissions, their soot reduction capabilities increase flexibility in the choice of engine operating conditions for controlling NO_x emissions.

For engine applications, biologically derived fatty acids are ordinarily converted into methyl or ethyl esters to improve physical properties such as viscosity and melting and boiling points. Typical biodiesel

fuels consist of mixtures of saturated and unsaturated methyl esters containing carbon chains 12 or more atoms in length [1]. Numerous engine combustion studies have been performed with these fuels and their constituents (e.g., [3]). However, the few fundamental studies suitable for comparison with chemical kinetic models are restricted to the pyrolysis regime (e.g., [4]), as are the only known detailed chemical kinetic models (e.g., [4]).

This paper describes the development of a detailed chemical kinetic model for methyl butanoate (nC₃H₇C(=O)OCH₃), a surrogate for biodiesel fuels. Although methyl butanoate does not have the high molecular weight of a biodiesel fuel, it has the essential chemical structural features, namely the RC(=O)OCH₃ structure (where R is an alkyl or alkenyl radical). Little literature information on thermodynamics and kinetics of RC(=O)OCH₃ and species derived from it is available. This paper strives to fill in some of these thermodynamic and chemical kinetic gaps. Methyl butanoate was chosen as a surrogate molecule for larger methyl esters in order to obtain a reaction mechanism of manageable size. Yet, methyl butanoate is large enough to allow the fast RO₂ isomerization reactions important in the

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Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 04 AUG 2000		2. REPORT TYPE N/A		3. DATES COVERED -	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Detailed Chemical Kinetic Mechanisms for Combustion of Oxygenated Fuels				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Sibley School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering Cornell University Ithaca, NY 14853, USA				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release, distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES See also ADM001790, Proceedings of the Combustion Institute, Volume 28. Held in Edinburgh, Scotland on 30 July-4 August 2000.					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 8	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

TABLE 1
 Hydrogen Bond Energies and Increments

Group Name	$\Delta H_{\text{BE}(298)}^{\text{a}}$ (kcal/mol)	$\Delta S_{(298)}^{\text{b}}$ (cal/(mol K))	Basis for Values
$\text{CH}_3\text{OC}(\cdot)=\text{O}$	98.4	0.84	Comparison of HOCO and HOCHO BAC-MP4 calculations [20]
$\cdot\text{CH}_2\text{OCHO}$	100.35	1.73	ΔH : CBS-Q calculations with group balance isodesmic reactions [18]; ΔS : $\cdot\text{CH}_2\text{OR}$ group [16]
$\cdot\text{CH}_2\text{C}(=\text{O})\text{OR}$	98.8	-1.31	Comparison of CH_2COOH and CH_3COOH BAC-MP4 calculations [20]
$\text{CH}_3\text{CH}(\cdot)\text{C}(=\text{O})\text{OR}$	96.2	-2.37	Values for $\cdot\text{CH}_2\text{C}(=\text{O})\text{OR}$, changed by the difference between $\text{CH}_3\text{CH}(\cdot)\text{CHO}$ and $\cdot\text{CH}_2\text{CHO}$ [16]

^aBond energy, for example, $\text{CH}_3\text{CH}(=\text{O}) \Rightarrow \text{CH}_3\text{OC}\cdot=\text{O} + \text{H}$, $\Delta H_{\text{BE}(298)} = 98.4$.

^bIncrement: value added to parent (Rln2 for electron spin and symmetry corrections are made on a molecule-specific case in the THERM program [16]).

low-temperature chemistry that controls fuel autoignition under conditions found in diesel engines. A model for methyl formate ($\text{HC}(=\text{O})\text{OCH}_3$) developed using the same reaction rate rules is presented as well.

Both methyl butanoate and methyl formate are the subject of several low-temperature oxidation studies performed in small, constant-volume, isothermal static reactors, with O_2 as the oxidant [5–8]. Temperatures and initial pressures range from 520 to 740 K and from 13 to 54 kPa, respectively. Most experiments use rich mixtures, but some experiments are performed with the equivalence ratio as low as 0.65 (methyl butanoate) and 0.1 (methyl formate). Pressure is usually the only experimental diagnostic, with results presented in the form of induction time or maximum rate of pressure rise, taken as representing the maximum reaction rate. Limited major species measurements [5,7,9] are available for methyl formate.

Methyl butanoate [6,8] exhibited a negative temperature coefficient (NTC) region, with a peak in maximum reaction rate occurring at about 585 K. No NTC behavior was observed for shorter-chain methyl esters including methyl formate [6]. Associated with NTC behavior is the occurrence of cool flames [10]. Cool flame limits, based on observations of luminosity, were reported for methyl butanoate [8,11], while no cool flames were seen for shorter-chain methyl esters [8] including methyl formate [11]. More recently, Baronnet and Brocard [12] summarized cool flame and NTC observations and proposed a criterion for their occurrence based on the availability of relatively fast isomerization pathways for alkyl peroxy radicals derived from the fuel. Since several alkyl peroxy radicals derived from methyl butanoate can participate in rapid isomerization reactions, the criterion successfully predicts NTC behavior and cool flames for this compound.

However, methyl formate meets the criterion as well through transfer of an aldehydic hydrogen atom via a 6-member ring. Baronnet and Brocard attribute its lack of NTC and cool flame behavior to its low enthalpy of combustion. In recent work, Good and Francisco [13] investigated the oxidation mechanism of methyl formate using *ab initio* computational chemistry methods.

Model Development

Chemical kinetic calculations were performed with the SENKIN code [14], which requires thermodynamic and kinetic data as input. Thermodynamic properties of the methyl esters and their decomposition products were estimated using group additivity [15] as implemented in the THERM code [16] with updated group values [17–19]. Several new bond dissociation groups developed to predict radical properties are listed in Table 1. During the development of the methyl butanoate mechanism, the value of the C-H bond dissociation energy for the C adjacent to the carbonyl was originally taken from Bozzelli and Chen [18] (93.1 kcal/mol). However, the resultant mechanism predicted no NTC behavior for methyl butanoate. In the final version of the mechanism, the C-H bond strength was increased to 96.2 kcal/mol, a value derived using BAC MP4 estimates [20] of similar radical species (Table 1). This increase in bond strength, with all the required accompanying changes in reaction rate constants, reproduced the experimentally observed NTC behavior.

The full chemical kinetic mechanism is available from E. M. Fisher (email: emf4@cornell.edu). For the most part, it follows the rules developed by Curran et al. [21] for *n*-heptane, as updated in an iso-octane study [19]. Because the C-H bond strength

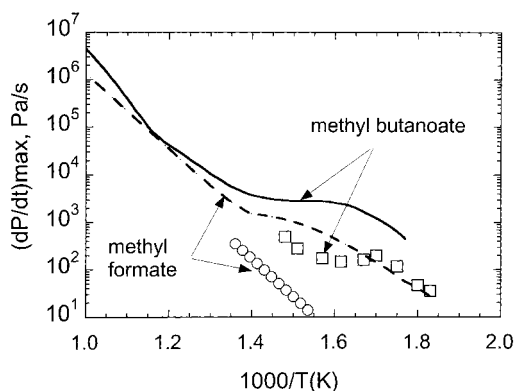


FIG. 1. Calculated values (lines) and experimental [6] values (symbols) of dP/dt_{\max} for isothermal, constant-volume combustion: 1:2 mixture of methyl butanoate and O_2 ; initial pressure 40.0 kPa. 1:1 mixture of methyl formate and O_2 ; initial pressure 53.3 kPa.

for the C adjacent to the carbonyl in methyl butanoate was very close to the value for tertiary carbon (96.2 vs. 96.5 kcal/mol), the rules for tertiary carbon were used for this site. The following classes of reaction were added or changed: (1) Fuel H abstraction by RO_2 species formed from the fuel was given half the rate for H abstraction by HO_2 . (2) Abstraction of the aldehydic H in species with two carbonyl groups was given rates based on aldehydic H abstraction. (3) A new approach for OH and O addition to olefinic species was based on propene literature [22–24]. (4) For radical attack on cyclic compounds, Evans-Polyani relations were used for activation energy estimates, representing each C–H bond 94 kcal/mol or weaker with its own set of abstraction reactions. In some cases, the product distribution was chosen for convenience rather than to represent products specific to the radical attack site.

The following changes were made in the rules for obtaining rate constants: (1) For isomerization of ester radicals, values of ring strain contributions to activation energy recommended by Benson for alkyl radicals [15] were used; for the RO_2 (alkyl peroxy analog) and O_2QOOH (peroxy-hydroperoxy-alkyl analog) species derived from the esters, Curran's ring strain values were used [21]. (2) Preexponential factors for isomerization of these three classes of species were obtained respectively by RADICALC [25] calculations of the transition state by matching rate constants to those of Curran et al. at 700 K and by adjusting preexponential factors for RO_2 isomerization to account for new degeneracy. (3) For $QOOH$ (hydroperoxyalkyl analog) scission to form olefin, carbonyl, and OH, a reverse reaction rate comparable to that for the reverse of alkyl radical beta scission was used. (4) Several specific reaction

rates were chosen by analogy with rates for oxygenated species, instead of using the rules developed for alkanes and their derivatives; these reactions fall mainly into the following categories: beta scission, unimolecular fuel decomposition, and RO (alkoxy analog) decomposition.

The methyl butanoate and methyl formate submechanisms were added to an updated version [19] of an existing *n*-heptane mechanism [21]. Reactions involving larger hydrocarbons (C_4 and higher) were removed to speed calculations. The exclusion of higher hydrocarbons had a minimal effect on calculated results with these ester fuels.

Computational Results: Comparison with Literature Data

Calculations were performed for comparison with static reactor experimental results [5–8] following the idealized description of experimental conditions provided, namely, combustion was assumed to take place isothermally and at constant volume. Two types of results were compared: the maximum value of the derivative of pressure with respect to time (dP/dt_{\max}), and the induction time, defined as the time at which dP/dt_{\max} occurred [6]. dP/dt_{\max} , which Parsons and Danby [5] indicated is related to the maximum reaction rate, was obtained from calculated pressure by numerical differentiation. In the experiments, pressure was measured with a manometer (probably recorded manually) and thus the data would not have allowed resolution of pressure changes more quickly than every several seconds; computed pressure derivatives did not take into account the manometer response time.

Calculations consistently indicated that combustion was more rapid than was observed experimentally. Fig. 1 shows the calculated and experimental [6] values of dP/dt_{\max} for the two methyl esters, as functions of the inverse of temperature. For comparison, Fig. 2 shows the same type of experimental data for propane and propene [26], along with computational results obtained with the hydrocarbon submechanism used in the ester calculations. The present reaction mechanism is based on ones used successfully to model propene oxidation in closed vessels [24] and low-temperature chemistry of propane in flow reactors [27,28]. The experimental apparatus and methods used in the various experiments shown in Figs. 1 and 2, performed in the same research group, were very similar. For all four compounds, the calculated dP/dt_{\max} was higher than the experimental value, exceeding it by factors of roughly 10, 50, 10, and 50, respectively, for methyl butanoate, methyl formate, propane, and propene. Features of the experimental curves appear to be displaced 50 to 70 K higher in the calculations, possibly indicating that heat release in the experiments

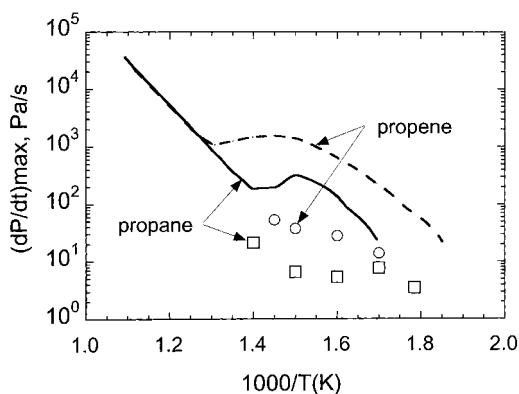


FIG. 2. Calculated values (lines) and experimental [26] values (symbols) of dP/dt_{\max} for isothermal, constant-volume combustion. 3:25 mixture of propane or propene with O_2 ; initial pressure 37.3 kPa.

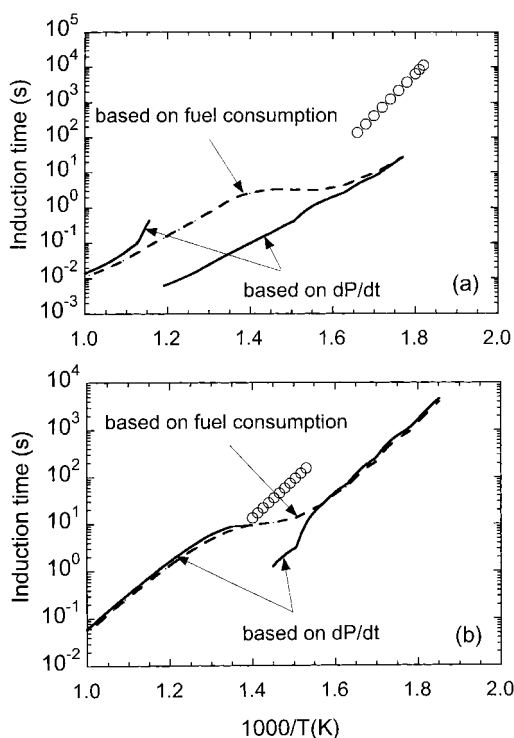


FIG. 3. Calculated values (lines) and experimental [6] values (symbols) of the induction time for methyl butanoate (a) and methyl formate (b). Same conditions as for Fig. 1.

caused deviations from the isothermal assumption made in the model. A comparison to a different static reactor experimental data set [8] gave qualitatively similar results: calculated values of dP/dt_{\max} showed a similar shape to experimental data, but with values 100 times higher.

Discrepancies in the overall speed of reaction, as represented by dP/dt_{\max} , may be due to errors in the kinetic mechanism or to departures of the experiment from ideal conditions. Because propane and propene, which have relatively well-established kinetic mechanisms, have discrepancies comparable to those for the methyl esters, a problem with the experimental methodology is likely. One plausible explanation is the presence of wall reactions in the experiments, consistent with the reported increase in reactivity with decreasing surface-to-volume ratio in other experiments of the Mulcahy/Parsons research group [29]. Cheaney et al. [30] report that HO_2 reacts on the surface of treated silica vessels which as a result of treatment have thin films of silicic, boric, or other acids. They postulate that HO_2 donates a proton to the surface. It is likely that other peroxy radicals would behave in a manner similar to HO_2 . Although vessel surface preparation was not discussed by Parsons et al. [5–7] or Mulcahy [26], closed vessels are often treated with acids prior to their experimental use (e.g., [24]). The magnitude of the effect of peroxy radical losses was investigated computationally by performing additional calculations with a rough representation of this type of wall reaction. Reactions converting all peroxy and peroxy-hydroperoxyalkyl radicals into fictitious non-reactive species were added to the mechanism. Rates for these reactions were chosen to be equal to the collision rate of the species on the wall, multiplied by a constant “efficiency.” The vessel volume (0.25 L) was assumed to be spherical and well mixed. An efficiency of 1.3% for all relevant species brought induction time and dP/dt_{\max} into agreement with experiment near the middle of the experimental temperature range for methyl butanoate. However, it overcorrected the methyl formate dP/dt_{\max} results.

Further indications of overall reactivity are provided in Fig. 3, which shows calculated and observed [6] induction times for the two methyl esters. Comparable experimental data is not available for propane and propene. Two different measures of induction time were applied to the calculated data: (1) the time at which the maximum value of dP/dt occurs, and (2) the time at which half the fuel is consumed. These two measures give similar answers at high and low temperatures but differ at intermediate values. The induction time based on the fuel destruction exhibits a smooth dependence on temperature, showing an NTC or near-NTC region in which reactivity has a low or negative dependence on temperature. In contrast, the data based on dP/dt shows an unusual dependence on temperature.

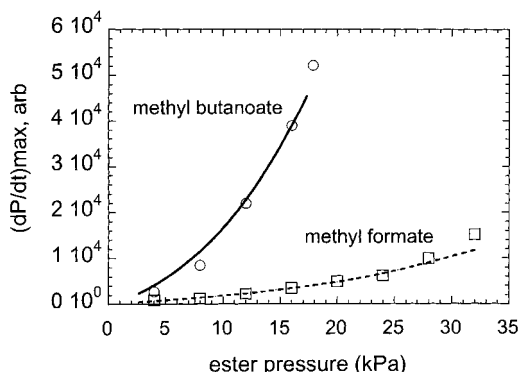


FIG. 4. Calculated values (lines) and normalized experimental [6] values (symbols) of dP/dt_{\max} for isothermal, constant-volume combustion at O_2 ; pressure 26.7 kPa, temperature 653 K.

Instead of a region of NTC behavior as temperature increases, there is an instantaneous shift to a longer induction time. The shift is due to the shape of the pressure histories. Both methyl esters show complex dP/dt curves as functions of time, with multiple peaks at certain temperatures. The relative prominence of these peaks changes as temperature increases, leading to an abrupt change in induction time as the location of the maximum value of dP/dt shifts from an earlier peak to a later one. Because the half width of the first peak is so short (less than a second typically), it is likely that it would not have been observed experimentally with a manometer. The other measure of induction time appears preferable for this reason, and also because it produces NTC results that agree with those seen in Fig. 1. Consistent with the dP/dt_{\max} results, calculated induction times obtained with either measure are factors of 10 to 50 times shorter than those observed experimentally. For both esters, calculated induction times with wall reactions agreed with experiment at some point in the experimental range. However, the model predicted a steeper temperature dependence of both induction time and dP/dt_{\max} than observed in the experiments.

Qualitative agreement was obtained with experiments [7] on the effect of ester pressure and O_2 pressure on reactivity at constant temperature. Fig. 4 shows dP/dt_{\max} calculations along with experimental data that has been normalized to match calculations at one point on each curve. The shape of the curves for both methyl esters is well predicted. Similar agreement was obtained for the effect of ester pressure on induction time based on fuel consumption. For the effect of O_2 pressure on dP/dt_{\max} , agreement in the curve shapes was good for methyl butanoate but poor for methyl formate.

Results: NTC Behavior

Regions either of NTC behavior or of a related weak dependence of overall reaction rate on temperature (near-NTC behavior) can be identified by examining either induction time or dP/dt_{\max} (indicative of maximum reaction rate). Calculated dP/dt_{\max} results indicate that propane, propene, methyl butanoate, and methyl formate have regions of NTC or near-NTC behavior located at 665–715, 690–765, 640–670, and 690–750 K, respectively. The experimental data show similar behavior for propane and methyl butanoate at 50 to 70 K lower temperatures. Propene experimental data are ambiguous, showing an inflection that can be interpreted as near-NTC behavior. Taking into account the temperature shift between experiment and calculation, methyl formate experiments appear to have been performed at slightly too high a temperature to observe the mild near-NTC region seen in the calculations. Induction times based on fuel destruction show NTC or near-NTC regions consistent with those of Fig. 1, while experimental induction times show no NTC behavior over their temperature range.

Reaction pathway analysis provides an explanation for the methyl butanoate's NTC behavior similar to that accepted for hydrocarbon fuels, (e.g., [21]). NTC behavior can be explained by examining the net creation and destruction of radicals in pathways available to the fuel molecule and its derivatives. In this isothermal system, chain branching processes (which increase the radical pool) have a particularly important effect on the overall reaction rate. At two points in the combustion process, there is a competition between (1) unimolecular decomposition pathways leading almost exclusively to chain propagation reactions, and (2) addition to O_2 , which leads much more frequently to chain branching reactions. Fig. 5 shows this competition for the radical formed by abstraction of one of the H atoms beta to the carbonyl group in methyl butanoate, one of the four possible radicals of methyl butanoate. The first competition occurs for radicals formed directly by H abstraction from the fuel (reaction 1, Fig. 5). These species can either decompose by beta scission (reaction 2) to produce one radical and one stable molecule, or can add to O_2 , which in some cases (see below) produces more than one radical (reaction 3). The second competition occurs for the QOOH species formed by isomerization (reaction 4) of the O_2 addition products of the initial radicals. These species, too, can either decompose unimolecularly (reaction 5) to a radical and either a cyclic ether species or an olefinic species, or can add to O_2 (reaction 6). The products of this second O_2 addition process invariably lead to chain-branching processes by formation either of OH and a carbonylhydroperoxide-like species (reaction 7) or of HO_2 and an olefinic hydroperoxide species. The stable species formed in

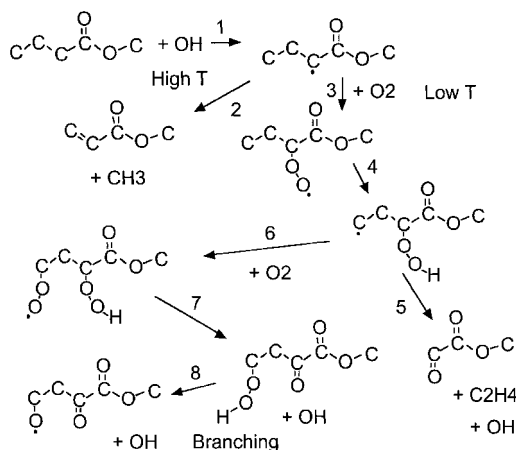


FIG. 5. Key low- and high-temperature reaction pathways of methyl butanoate for one hydrogen abstraction site. Carbon atoms are assumed to be saturated with H atoms, except where radical site is noted.

this way readily decomposes to form two radicals (reaction 8).

In each of these competitions, the rate of the unimolecular decomposition process (producing no net radicals) increases more rapidly with increasing temperature than that of the O₂ addition process (ultimately producing as many as two net radicals). Thus, although all rates increase as temperature increases, higher temperatures favor the chain-propagating processes over the chain branching ones, leading to a net decrease in reactivity over some temperature range. This change can be illustrated for the conditions of Figs. 1 and 3 by considering the fate of the radical formed by abstraction of one of the H atoms beta to the carbonyl group in methyl butanoate (Fig. 5). At 665 K, at the point where half the fuel is consumed, over 99% of this species reacts with O₂ (reaction 3). At 765 K, unimolecular decomposition to methyl and an olefinic methyl ester (reaction 2) becomes the dominant route, accounting for 75% of the reaction flux, and at 865 K the unimolecular decomposition pathway accounts for more than 97% of the reaction flux. The fate of the isomerization products of the initial O₂ addition reaction changes with temperature as well. At 665 K, over 50% of the flux through these species leads to chain branching (reaction 6), while at 765 K only 25% leads to chain

TABLE 2
Arrhenius Parameters ($k = AT^n \exp(-E_A/(RT))$) and Sensitivity Coefficients of Selected Reactions

Reaction	Sensitivity Coefficient at 665 K	Sensitivity Coefficient at 765 K	A (cm ³ mol, s units)	n (for T in K)	E _A (cal/mol)
mb + o2 ⇌ ho2 + mb2j ^a	0.083	0.055	4.00E + 13	0	41,300
mb2oo ⇌ mb2ooh4j	-0.068	-0.011	6.10E + 10	0	25,076
mb + ho2 ⇌ h2o2 + mb2j	-0.054	-0.059	4.32E + 12	0	14,400
mb + oh ⇌ h2o + mb3j	0.048	0.020	4.68E + 07	1.61	-35
mb + oh ⇌ h2o + mb4j	-0.044	-0.007	5.25E + 09	0.97	1,590
mb2oo ⇌ mb2ooh3j	0.041	0.016	1.09E + 12	0	29,206
mb + ch3o2 ⇌ ch3o2h + mb2j	-0.028	-0.055	4.00E + 12	0	14,000
mb + mb2oo ⇌ mb2ooh + mb2j	-0.026	abs value <0.007	2.16E + 12	0	14,400
ch3o + o2 ⇌ ch2o + ho2 ^b	0.023	0.024	5.50E + 10	0	2,424
co2 + ch3 ⇌ ch3oco ^a	-0.020	abs value <0.007	1.50E + 11	0	36,730
mp2d + ch3 ⇌ mb2j ^a	abs value <0.007	-0.052	1.00E + 11	0	7,600
ch3o2 + ch3 ⇌ 2ch3o ^b	abs value <0.007	0.016	7.00E + 12	0	-1,000
mb + oh ⇌ h2o + mb2j	-0.015	-0.015	1.15E + 11	0.51	63
mb + ch3o ⇌ ch3oh + mb2j	-0.013	-0.013	3.80E + 10	0	2,800

Note: Sensitivity coefficients represent the sensitivity of the methyl butanoate concentration to change in individual rate constant using standard CHEMKIN sensitivity analysis [14], at the point where 10% of the fuel is consumed. Conditions the same as Fig. 1. Initial temperatures are 665 and 765 K. "mb" denotes methyl butanoate structure. "mp" denotes methyl propanoate structure. "j" denotes radical site. Numbered label (e.g., mb2j) refers to carbon position where the C=O carbon is carbon 1. "d" denotes double bond. For hydroperoxyalkyl radical analogs (e.g., mb2ooh4j), the first number refers to "ooh" location and the second number to radical site location.

^areaction proceeds in reverse of direction written here.

^breverse rate constants specified as well.

branching. Methyl formate follows a similar pattern, with a shift from reaction with O_2 addition and chain branching to chain-propagating unimolecular decomposition reactions when temperatures increase through the NTC region.

Table 2 shows the reactions to which methyl butanoate is most sensitive at temperatures in and above the NTC region. Both sensitivity coefficients and Arrhenius parameters are listed. Reactions involving the carbon beta to the carbonyl group are prominent at both temperatures because of the relatively weak C-H bond there. A surprising result is the sensitivity to the reaction of HO_2 with a key methyl butanoate radical, a termination reaction which slows down the overall rate of oxidation. Isomerization reactions such as reaction 4 (Fig. 5) are important in the NTC region (665 K). Above the NTC region (765 K), reactions of the fuel with RO_2 radicals control the chemistry and accelerate the overall rate of oxidation.

Summary and Conclusions

Detailed chemical kinetic models for combustion of methyl butanoate and methyl formate have been developed following rules developed for hydrocarbon combustion. The mechanisms have been tested against the limited combustion data available in the literature, which was obtained at low temperature, subatmospheric conditions in static vessels, using pressure measurements as the main diagnostic. Some qualitative agreement was obtained, but the experimental data consistently indicated lower overall reactivities than the model, differing by factors of 10 to 50. This discrepancy, which occurs for species with well-established kinetic mechanisms as well as for methyl esters, is tentatively ascribed to the presence of wall reactions in the experiments. The model predicts a region of weak or negative dependence of overall reaction rate on temperature for each methyl ester. Examination of the reaction fluxes provides an explanation of this behavior, involving a temperature-dependent competition between chain-propagating unimolecular decomposition processes and chain-branching processes, similar to that accepted for hydrocarbons. There is an urgent need to obtain more complete and well-characterized experimental data for thorough testing of the model.

Acknowledgments

This work was performed under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Energy by the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory under contract No. W-7405-ENG-48. The authors thank Prof. Joseph Bozzelli and Chiung Ju Chen of the New Jersey Institute of Technology for their prepublication values of bond energies on esters.

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COMMENTS

William H. Green, MIT, USA. Liquid-phase low-temperature oxidation experiments indicate that the C–H bond adjacent to a carbonyl group in an ester is stronger, not weaker, than an alkyl C–H. It may be worthwhile to reexamine the thermochemical calculations on this bond strength.

Author's Reply. We have two computed values of the bond strength available. One is 96.2 kcal/mol based indirectly on BAC MP4 calculations of Melius (Ref. [20] in this paper) as explained in the paper (Table 1); the other is 93.1 kcal/mol calculated by Bozzelli and Chen (Ref. [18] in this paper) using the CBS-Q method with isodesmic reactions. Therefore, we think it is unlikely that the bond strength is

stronger than a secondary alkyl C–H (98.5 kcal/mol) (Ref. [17] in this paper). It would be useful to have more details on the nature of the experimental evidence that you mention for a stronger C–H bond. Presumably, the experiments rely on measurements of stable products, and their results may be attributable to kinetic or other factors besides differences in bond strength. However, a reexamination of the calculations would be worthwhile to see if some detail was overlooked. Our understanding of these liquid-phase experiments is that the conclusion of “higher” or “lower” bond strength is inferred from product analysis of the oxidation of the ester. It may also be worthwhile to reexamine the interpretation of these experiments that give an indirect indication of relative bond strength.